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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3949
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY PRIORITY
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0750
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS ANTANANARIVO 001348

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR AF/E, AF/FO, INR/AA, AND DRL
PARIS FOR D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [MA](#)

SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR CALM ON THE EVE OF ELECTION WEEKEND

REF: ANTANANARIVO 1334 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (U) In early afternoon the last day of the campaign, except for 30,000 supporters who filled the stadium in Antananarivo to see President/candidate Marc Ravalomanana, the rest of Madagascar appears to be calm and quiet. Campaign rallies in different cities are expected to continue into tonight, but as of 0700 local time December 2, the campaign period is officially closed and public political action forbidden.

¶2. (U) Potentially significant to voter turn-out, a tropical storm "Anita" has formed off the northwest coast of Madagascar and is expected to hit the west coast near Morondava in the coming two-three days. While now weakening, the storm will still deliver heavy rains and wind, thus probably dampening voter participation in affected areas.

Observers Deploy

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¶3. (U) Over 150 international observers deployed to the field December 1 to be in place for the Sunday, December 3 election: over 70 U.S. Mission American and Malagasy staff; 52 Europeans; 24 delegates of the SADC Parliamentarian Forum; 10 from La Francophonie; and others. In addition, 2,000 Malagasy observers trained by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) with USG financing will watch the poll.

Last Words

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¶4. (U) Among opposition candidates, Herizo appears to have emerged as the most serious contender with national reach. Herizo has also stated his supporters will use cell phone Short Message Service (SMS) technology to quickly communicate results to his party headquarters. A few candidates are focusing their efforts near home. Whether the 13 can muster over 50 percent combined and force a run-off is an open question. The first clue to the answer will be reports from the field December 3 about how many candidates printed and distributed their ballots for voters.

¶5. (SBU) One potential opposition accusation appears to have been avoided: unofficial, unreleased results of a USG-funded media monitoring program indicate that state radio and media did offer equal free time to all candidates as required by law. Private media, not bound by campaign rules, varied from biased (the President's MBS network) to surprisingly balanced (Don Bosco Radio and TV Plus). Most striking was that campaign-related media was limited to free or paid air time -

news coverage of the campaign was almost non-existent. An early explanation suggests station managers avoided news reports on the campaign altogether for fear of retribution - not just from the President or the GOM, but from any of the 14 candidates. If they did a news piece on one candidate, for example, the other 13 might all complain.

16. (U) Post will be monitoring Sunday's polls and communicating regularly with Mission observers from the Embassy. Point of contact in case of queries from the Department is DCM George N. Sibley at 261-33-442-2404 (direct) or IVG 590-2404, email SibleyGN@state.gov.

McGEE